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SUBJECT: AHMED WALI KARZAI AND GOVERNOR WEESA ON GOVERNANCE
IN KANDAHAR

Classified By: Interagency Provincial Affairs Deputy Coordinator Hoyt Y
ee for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: in a lengthy and cordial introductory meeting with Kandahar Provincial Council Chief Ahmed Wali Karzai (AWK) and Governor Tooryalai Weesa, Senior Civilian Representative (SCR) for the South Frank Ruggiero underscored the need for improved governance in Kandahar, and highlighted the importance of naming credible provincial governors and district officials before the inauguration to send a positive signal on good governance to the Afghan people and the international community. Both AWK and Weesa acknowledged the weakness of the government in Kandahar, and outlined their proposals for local solutions, including the empowerment of shuras of district elders for local dispute resolution rather than the courts. AWK also emphasized large-scale infrastructure projects rather than smaller cash-for-work program, and his desire to see private security companies in the province under one licensee. AWK discounted the role of elections and their importance to Afghans. End Summary.

AWK Nervous but Eager to Share Views

12. (C) SCR Ruggiero met with AWK and Governor Weesa on September 28 in the Governor's Palace in Kandahar City. The Representative of Canada in Kandahar (RoCK) Ben Rowswell also attended the meeting, which was held in a wood-paneled room, beneath a large photo of President Hamid Karzai. (Note: While we must deal with AWK as the head of the Provincial Council, he is widely understood to be corrupt and a narcotics trafficker. End Note) AWK, dressed in a crisp white shalwar kameez and pinstriped vest, appeared nervous, though eager to express his views on the international presence in Kandahar.

The Importance of Good Governance

13. (C) SCR emphasized the criticality of good governance in the province, and said the United States would like to see improvement in the post-election period. He said the United States is ready to work with the GIROA to strengthen key provincial and district level governance, but we are only willing to expend our resources in people and programs if we have confidence those resources will pay off and make a real difference.

14. (C) Both AWK and Weesa acknowledged there was a credibility gap between the public and the government. Weesa said it was a problem that in the 10 months he had been in office, the government had not been able to deliver 24-hour electricity to the people, and that 150 factories had closed because of it. He said people looked to NGOs more than to the government to deliver services, and he complained that

NGOs poach workers from the government by offering higher wages. SCR emphasized the importance of naming credible provincial governors and district officials before the inauguration to send a positive signal on good governance to the Afghan people and the international community.

15. (C) AWK suggested one way of fighting corruption in the province would be to re-establish and empower district shuras, instead of judges or police, to settle local disputes. Currently there is only one judge for the five districts around Kandahar City, he said, and a council of local elders would be more effective at resolving land, water and other disputes. (Note: there are a total of seven judges for all 17 districts in the province.) "You can easily bribe the chief of police or a judge," he said, "but you can't bribe 50 elders." He said the provincial council, with the support of the governor, could initiate the formation of these district shuras, which would consist of 10-15 elders elected by the people.

Infrastructure Priorities, Private Security Contractors and Conflicts of Interest

16. (C) AWK said he had been in Kandahar almost continuously since 1992, and that the U.S. reputation in the province was built on the back of two key infrastructure projects done in the 1950s and 60s. He said what would make a difference to the population today would be similar large-scale, labor-intensive projects that would provide jobs to the people and keep them from being recruited by the Taliban. AWK cautioned against the use of small scale projects and

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additional cash-for-work programs; he stated that the use of implementing partners does not allow expenditure of development resources to reach villagers and other local Afghans. Both he and Weesa added that it should be the local elders who are empowered to distribute these jobs, not officials or companies from outside.

Putting Private Security Under the Direction of the Provincial Council

17. (C) In the same vein of providing "local solutions to local problems," as he put it, AWK recommended a "local solution" to the problem of providing security in the area. He said that currently, there are many jihadi commanders with militias who independently provide protection to convoys and projects, but that a proposal before the Ministry of Interior would bring all these commanders under one umbrella in Kandahar, with one person given the license for the private security sector. He said there would be a meeting Wednesday (September 30) of all the security companies, under the auspices of the Provincial Council, to appoint this representative to send to Kabul. (Note: AWK is understood to have a stake in private security contracting, and has aggressively lobbied the Canadians to have his security services retained for the Dahla Dam refurbishment. Both he and the governor have tried to exert control over how contracts are awarded in the province) all of which could be a significant conflict of interest in the province. End Note.)

Elections: What's the Point?

18. (C) In answer to a question from the RoCK and the SCR about the credibility of the elections, AWK said democracy was new for Afghanistan, and that people in the region did not understand the point of having one election, let alone two. "The people do not like change," he said. "They think, the President is alive, and everything is fine. Why have an election?"

Comment

¶9. (C) The meeting with AWK highlights one of our major challenges in Afghanistan: how to fight corruption and connect the people to their government, when the key government officials are themselves corrupt. Given AWK's reputation for shady dealings, his recommendations for large, costly infrastructure projects should be viewed with a healthy dose of skepticism. Still, his observations about the unintended consequences of how NGOs and other international partners do their work, e.g. "poaching" of government staff, track with some of our own concerns, including about how to promote Afghan-led solutions. We will continue to urge AWK to improve his own credibility gap as well as that of the GIROA.
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